

Devising Second Language Learning Through Pleasure

Using dance and creative arts as bridges between verbal and non-verbal communication by educator and Somatic Movement Therapist **Laura Colomban**.



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Move Play 'n Jump into English is a second language learning programme devised for children and nurseries which aims to support second language learning through dance and creative arts. Started at Fondazione Querini Stampalla in Venice on 1 March 2016, it has developed into a six-year funded programme in nurseries and elementary schools in mainland Venice.

How the programme began

When I started devising the first course, I had just returned from California, where I was working as a dance teaching artist and assistant in various programmes at Luna Dance Institute. I worked in underserved communities and public schools with children with different abilities and from different economic and cultural backgrounds. My decision for creating Move Play 'n Jump into English has been a response to my own experience of second language learning.

As an Italian, I studied English from a young age and struggled during my school years to learn whilst sitting still. The difficulty of stillness was taking my attention away from reading and studying. When I went to study dance in the USA, I experienced a radical change, and it wasn't only because I was surrounded by English speakers. I believe the change happened because I was associating English with an activity I loved, with my sensed experience of the world.

The rationale

Move Play 'n Jump into English has four main pillars: Moving, Creating, Singing, and Connecting.

The USA National Art Standards guidance states that "the arts teach a different lesson. They cultivate the direct experiences of the senses (...). Their goal is to connect person and experience directly, to build the bridge between verbal and non-verbal, between the strictly logical and the emotional - the better to gain an understanding of the whole".

Several studies have shown structural differences in grey matter and white matter in children who engage in music (especially during early childhood) compared with those who do not. They observed neural changes and significant differences in associated reading skills, sound-processing skills and speech as well. It has been proven that engagement with musical rhythms at a young age supports synchrony in social development.

"My intention for creating this programme for children was clear: I was not really concerned about them learning the vocabulary, but more so to associate English with joy."

The structure of the class

After a pilot programme at Fondazione Querini Stampalla, I submitted the proposal to the Educational Department of the City of Venice, receiving funding for three years, which allowed me to teach in more nurseries, reaching more than a thousand children aged 3-5 years.

The structure of the class was clear: first of all, I talked only in English to bring them straight into a different



sounding environment. We would start with a warm-up associated with English rhymes and songs, including a range of images which introduced animals, colours, shapes and natural elements. Even if they may not have understood the words, they were engaged in the activities, hence unconsciously integrating the associations with the sound of the words.

I would then guide improvisations, using props for the youngest to create connections, exploring levels, energy and effort, using different body parts and naming them, and using flashcards to create personal dances. Dance and upbeat music allowed them to use their imagination, move with high energy in the space, and be silly and loud.

Through time, I have observed increased coordination and language retention: teachers and parents from different schools shared that children were using English words in other contexts as well as becoming more confident in their movement and creating emotional connections with each other, especially building a bridge for children with physical and language barriers in class.

Observing the students over time, however, I also started to be concerned about emotional self-regulation and distress. I found the Tapping Technique book for children (known as Emotional Freedom Technique or EFT), which is based on the combined principles of ancient Chinese acupressure and modern psychology. Applied in class, even for a brief moment, I could see how some children who were experiencing more difficulty to self-regulate could find a moment of peace. Developing the programme forward, I would certainly focus on how to develop self-regulation in children via a constellation of movement, tapping and sound arts.

Currently, the programme continues to receive funding and is delivered in nurseries, elementary schools and community centres thanks to Martina Trombini from

Macacotour, and has become an established part of schools' curricula.

What's been most interesting is the universality of dance and how we can integrate it into learning processes, as it transverse intersectionalities and connects us all together, bringing aliveness to the curriculum whilst attending to the emotional, physical and mental needs of our children and students.

Further information

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Resources for structure and creative input:

Green Gilbert, A. (2006). *Brain-compatible dance education*. National Dance Association.

Niemann, C. (2016). *Words (First Edition)*. Greenwillow Books, An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

Reedy, P. (2015). *Body, mind & spirit in action: A teacher's guide to creative dance (2nd edition)*. Luna Dance Institute.

Resources for self-regulation, tapping technique for children:

Ortner, A., & Mariano, E. (2016). *Gorilla thumps & bear hugs: A tapping solution children's story (1st edition)*. Hay House Inc.

References

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- The National Core Arts Standards | National Art Standard. (n.d.). Retrieved 13 February 2023, from <https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/core-art-standards>